

[007] There are other reasons a recipient may wish to have an item delivered to a delivery point other than the one specified by the sender. For example, if a recipient learns that a parcel is going to be delivered to his house tomorrow, but he cannot receive the parcel because he must make a last minute out-of-town business trip, he may wish to have the parcel delivered to his out-of-town hotel. A recipient may also wish to redirect delivery of a perishable item if the specified delivery point is not conducive to preserving it; or redirect the delivery of an item having special physical characteristics, such as high weight or large size, that cannot be accommodated at the specified delivery point. Or, the recipient may just wish to redirect delivery of an item for convenience sake.

[008] Accordingly, a need exists for systems and methods of item delivery that allow a recipient to flexibly customize the delivery point and delivery time while the item is en route. There is a need to provide recipients with the ability to redirect an item to a new delivery point and to specify the time of delivery at the delivery point, based on information about the item. Further, there is a need for item delivery systems and methods that enable a sender to flexibly specify the return delivery point for an item that is returned (e.g., when the sender becomes the new recipient because the item was undeliverable to the addressee).

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[009] In accordance an embodiment consistent with the principles of the present invention, a method for changing the delivery point of a mail item while the item is en route comprises determining a first delivery point of the item; notifying, based on the first delivery point, a recipient that the item is en route; accepting a

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second delivery point or confirming the initial delivery point; and delivering the item to the second delivery point.

[010] Additional features of the invention will be set forth in part in the description which follows, and in part will be obvious from the description, or may be learned by practice of the invention. The features of the invention will be realized and attained by means of the elements and combinations particularly pointed out in the appended claims.

[011] It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory only and are not restrictive of the invention, as claimed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[012] The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate several embodiments of the invention and together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

[013] Figure 1 is a block diagram of an exemplary system for flexible delivery of a mail item consistent with the principles of the present invention; and

[014] Figure 2 is a flow chart of an exemplary process for flexible delivery of a mail item consistent with the principles of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENTS

[015] Systems and methods consistent with the principles of the present invention provide the ability to specify the delivery point and time for the mail item being delivered, while the item is en route. In addition, the principles of the present invention allow the recipient, sender, or mailer to flexibly to act alone or in

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combination with each other when changing the delivery point and/or time of the mail item. While a mail item, such as a parcel, is en route between the sending point and the delivery point, a notification is sent to indicate that the parcel is in transit. In response, the delivery of the mail item may be changed. For example, the destination specified by the sender (e.g., the delivery address written on the parcel) may be changed or a delivery time may be specified. The mail item is then delivered to the new delivery point and/or at the specified delivery time.

[016] Reference will now be made in detail to specific exemplary embodiments of the invention. Wherever possible, the same reference numbers will be used throughout the description to refer to the same or like parts. The invention is described using embodiments involving United States Postal Service (USPS) equipment and systems. One of ordinary skill in the art will recognize, however, that the principles of the present invention apply to a wide variety of delivery systems and methods and are not limited to the specific embodiments described.

[017] SYSTEM OVERVIEW

[018] Figure 1 is a block diagram of an exemplary system for flexible delivery of a mail item consistent with the principles of the present invention. As shown, a mail item 100 is moved from right to left by a mail transport device 110. Mail item 100 may be any type of item known to those skilled in the art, such as a parcel, a letter, or a package. As it moves, mail item 100 passes through an illuminated area under a camera 120. Camera 120 records an image of mail item 100, including its mailing label, upon which is written a recipient's address and a return address for the sender.

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